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Employer Marketing

REAGENT RANT **NO.7**



TALENT ATTRACTION

THE RACE TO COME SECOND



I am deeply distraught this month. It turns out I am a fraud.

I thought I was in the business of helping clients write ads that are designed to attract talent, but it turns out I'm mistaken.

After 25 years of being under the misapprehension that what we do is help people find the best people for their roles, I find out that I am actually in the business of writing ads that give the impression that recruiters are trying to fill vacancies. The ones that their internal clients expect them to fill, and will be hounding them shortly to find out what they are doing about filling them.

Many recruitment ads are like rocking chairs – they give the impression of movement and progress, without having any actual or discernable effect on outcomes to problems. They are often there to silence the critics, and pacify the sponsors.

A very learned colleague of ours at TQ Solutions (www.tqsolutions.net.au) pointed out to me recently the difference between hiring 'the best in the market', as opposed to hiring 'the best on the market'.

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What he means of course is that many recruiters tend to want to select from the best available talent presented at any one specific point in time, rather than uncover the best available and persuade them to join us, whether they are on the market or not.

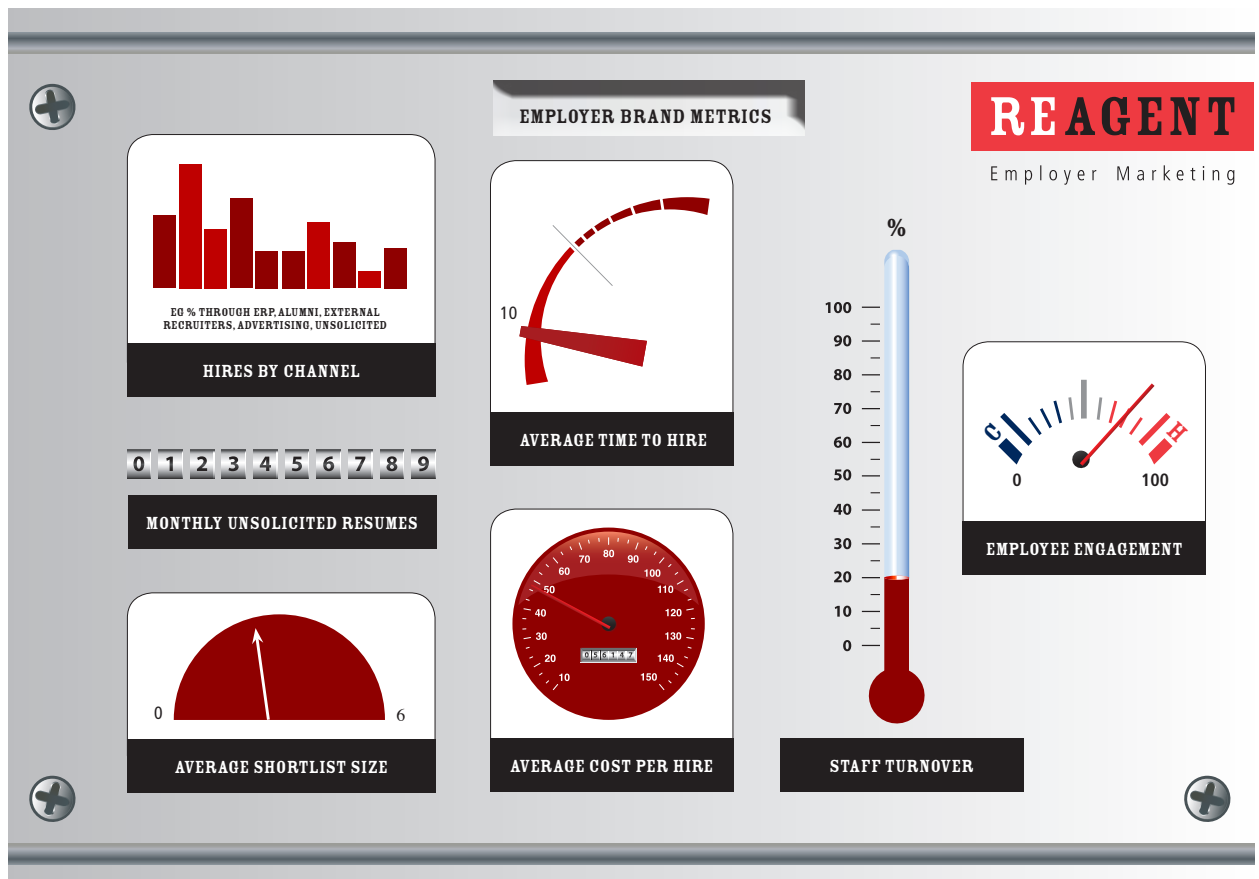
It can be summed up by asking yourself this question – are you interested in:

A. Filling vacancies

B. Hiring the best talent

This is of course a choice we all can make – there are very few possible excuses for claiming the second option is not available to us. It is of course a matter of how much we value the choice, and how much we are incentivised/managed to provide this choice to our organisations.

One of the key problems of course is the way recruitment teams are managed – ie the metrics used to assess their performance and gauge their success. Typically these are all easily-measured metrics, such as time-to-hire, cost-per-hire and hires-per-recruiter. We use a dashboard a little like this:



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Rarely are teams judged on the cultural fit, performance of hire against benchmarks, satisfaction of hiring managers or length of service of hires. These are far too hard to measure and report, so few bother. But we still need to manage our RPOs and recruitment teams, so the simple measures persist.

But what behaviour and outcomes do they encourage? What are the results of these overwhelming encouragements to tick boxes? Well, dare I say they end up in recruiters being completely unimaginative in their attempts to market their roles and simply relying on list-generation methods that deliver piles of resumes from which to select the closest match to requirements.

It's a bit like clattering the pans in the kitchen to persuade the wife you're actually washing up. It might postpone the inevitable but, ultimately, it doesn't fool anyone.

Now this is all rather good news for third party recruitment firms, who are actually judged on the outcomes of their actions and paid for success only. So you'd think then that they are more incentivised to prise happily-employed talent from their employers by creating sophisticated and entertaining recruitment ads that deliver the best talent, not just the best available talent.

But from where I sit I have seen little evidence of this. Most recruitment ads I see are still just condensed position descriptions, sometimes dressed up in bad puns and clichés.

They are written on the assumption that there are a whole bunch of smart and talented people out there just waiting for our ads to be placed so they can 'Get their career back on track'. And to drive the point home, we'll even put a shot of train tracks in there.

If you compare the average recruitment ad for a CFO from 30 years ago versus today, I doubt you'd be able to tell the difference. In marketing departments across the world we have seen an evolution of the consumer proposition as we understand what drives human behaviour, and the uptake in new media accelerate as new media channels and technologies become available.

But in Recruitment, it's a universal groundhog day. The whole industry defiantly refusing to adapt to modern thinking and accepted improvements in marketing methods and disciplines.

It's as if we are all in a race to come second.

Why is this? Is it a national fear of being first? Is it the tall poppy syndrome still alive and well? Are we becoming the sheep that we built the wealth of a nation on?

The fact is that corporations are getting the help they need from specialist ad agencies to understand how to connect with the best talent and learn how to attract and retain it.

We regularly run training sessions for in-house recruitment teams entitled 'Imagine a life without job boards' – it's always fun to see the fear and confusion on their poor faces...

We help recruiters expand beyond the safety net of job boards and newspapers, explore new ways of connecting with their audiences, and create unique and compelling messages to engage them. Companies are doing this through in-house recruitment teams and RPOs, and even through employer brand guidelines to their PSA panels.

This is happening right now, and it is a trend that's accelerating.

To stay competitive in this marketplace of smart and empowered RPO and in-house recruitment teams, we must think and try harder than them to engage with the talent that we find hard to reach.

We must examine the media consumption habits of our target audiences. We must put ourselves in their shoes and talk to them the way they want to be talked to. We must present the information in a way they find attractive, and allow them to enquire further in the manner they find most comfortable.

We must give them time, respect, enough information to make a decision and encourage them to commit further, bit by bit. Like coaxing a wild animal out of its cave.

We must have a careers website that competes with the best in the world (as this is where it operates), and an Applicant Tracking System that behaves like a Concierge or Maître d' welcoming people in, rather than a Recruitment Bouncer intent on keeping them out.

We must have people for them to speak to and information for them to digest. We must manage their path into and through our organisation through the various Touchpoints they encounter, and make them all positive and rewarding.

But above all, we must have the burning desire to be first, rather than first loser, in the race for the best talent.

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